

PENN SCHOOL HISTORIC DISTRICT
St. Helena Island
Frogmore vicinity
Beaufort County
South Carolina

HABS NO. SC-588

HABS
SC

7-FROG V,

1-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Southeast Region
South Carolina

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE South Carolina	COUNTY Beaufort	TOWN OR VICINITY Frogmore vicinity
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Penn School Historic District		HABS NO. SC-588
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE Penn Center Historic District; Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) Route SC 37, one mile south of Frogmore, St. Helena Island		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1855-1968	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Northern missionaries organized one of the first southern schools for blacks here in 1862. Pioneered in health services and self-help programs. The oldest existing structure is the Brick Church (1855). Dr. Martin Luther King and staff held meetings here (see Nat'l Reg. form		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) at least 18 structures on the site, predominately of brick and frame construction		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE)		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE see individual forms		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) see individual forms		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Good. Museum.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE Penn School site served the community as an educational institution, health clinic, farm bureau, and repository for the preservation of Gullah heritage and history unique to St. Helena Island. The school closed in 1948 but the community service and preservation continues		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) The National Register of Historic Places, 1976 (p. 638) and the Catalog of National Historic Landmarks 1985 (Penn School is listed on both registers).		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION C. Crawford, historian, HABS/HAER		DATE April 1987

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District #1 - Congressman Mendel J. Davis

9. Society and Social Conscience

Form 10-300
(July 1969)UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: South Carolina	
COUNTY: Beaufort	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
SEP 9	1974

1. NAME	
COMMON: Penn Center Historic District	
AND/OR HISTORIC: Penn School; Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School; (see continuation sheet)	

2. LOCATION	
STREET AND NUMBER: one mile south of Frogmore on S.C. Highway #37	
CITY OR TOWN: Frogmore vicinity	
STATE: South Carolina	CODE 045
COUNTY: Beaufort	CODE 013

3. CLASSIFICATION			
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	RECEIVED
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	community services	JAY 28 1974
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY	
OWNER'S NAME: Penn Community Services, Inc.	
STREET AND NUMBER: P.O. Box 126	
CITY OR TOWN: Frogmore	STATE: South Carolina
	CODE 045

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION	
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Beaufort County Court House	
STREET AND NUMBER: Bay Street	
CITY OR TOWN: Beaufort	STATE: South Carolina
	CODE 045

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS	
TITLE OF SURVEY: Inventory of Historic Places in South Carolina	
DATE OF SURVEY: 1973	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: South Carolina Department of Archives and History	
STREET AND NUMBER: 1430 Senate Street	
CITY OR TOWN: Columbia	STATE: South Carolina
	CODE 045

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

HABS NO. 2C-700

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The landscape surrounding Penn Center on St. Helena Island remains virtually unchanged since the island was occupied by Union troops in November, 1861. The total of 400 acres owned by Penn is flat and sandy, dotted with salt marshes and creeks. Before the War Between the States a superior brand of cotton, unique to the semi-tropical sea islands, flourished on St. Helena; plant life presently includes live oaks, yellow jessamine, palmettoes, and wisteria.

The developed 47 acres of the Penn campus is divided by Land's End Road, lined with Spanish-moss covered oaks. Structures on the campus, located about one mile from Frogmore, the nearest town, span a time period of over one-hundred years, from an antebellum church to a retreat house constructed in 1968. Brick Church, the oldest building still standing, was built in 1855 by Baptist planters of St. Helena. During Reconstruction it served as the nucleus of the community of freed slaves and northern abolitionists and was used as church, meeting hall, and school. Unaltered, the church is in present day use.

The rectangular brick church, two stories high with a gable roof, is ornamented with symmetrically arranged windows, doors, and brick pilasters. Pilasters, two stories high, project between the windows and on the corners of the church. Facade has five bays; doorway is flanked by two 9/9 light windows on each side. Side of church has three bays: two 9/9 light windows on each side, and a centrally placed 12/12 light window.

Brick Church was an early location of the first school for free blacks in the South--Penn School. Location of the school was moved in 1864 to a prefabricated schoolhouse, shipped by boat from Philadelphia and re-assembled on St. Helena. Although the original schoolhouse is no longer standing, Penn School was in operation until 1948. In the mid-20th Century the school was converted into Penn Community Services, Inc., a non-profit organization with five divisions: cultural, business, child-care, black land services, and conference center.

With the exception of Brick Church, all buildings on the Penn Campus were constructed during the 20th Century and are of no architectural significance. The approximately 17 buildings, connected by unpaved roads, include dormitories, administrative buildings, workshops, and dining hall. There are also tennis courts, living accommodations for staff, and health clinics. A retreat center is located $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the main campus, on Capers Creek. The unity of the 47 acres is not that of architectural style but of purpose: the campus has served the black community from 1862 until the present day. Buildings on a campus of this type are by necessity transitory; as the needs of the community change, new structures are built and old ones destroyed. Although the physical layout has varied over the years, the goals of both Penn School and Penn Community Services, as well as the landscape and plant life of the sea island setting, remain constant.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian ☐ 16th Century ☐ 18th Century ☒ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century ☐ 17th Century ☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1855, 1862, 1901, 1951

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <u>Black History</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Founded in 1862 as a school for freed slaves, Penn School established a commitment to black education, black welfare, and black heritage which has remained strong for over one hundred years. The school functioned as an educational institution, health clinic, farm bureau, and catalyst for community action, as well as a repository for preserving the island's unique Gullah heritage and written history. Penn Community Services, Inc., the present-day organization, continues to work for the black community politically, socially, and culturally.

Education

The founders of Penn School were members of a group of northern missionaries and abolitionists who came to the South Carolina sea island following the Union take-over during the War Between the States. Education was a top priority, and classes were held in cotton houses, cabins, and deserted plantation houses scattered over St. Helena. The only school of this type to survive was one established by Laura Towne of Philadelphia and her friend Ellen Murray. The classes, attended by about 80 students, were later held at Brick Church, and in 1864 the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Association sent a schoolhouse, ready to be assembled, to St. Helena. The prefabricated structure was erected opposite Brick Church and named the "Penn School". Laura Towne lived on the island, supervising the school and providing health services to the residents until her death in 1901. Before her death, she convinced the president of Hampton Institute, Hollis B. Frissell, of the value and potential of the school, and in the early 20th Century, he became chairman of Penn's Board of Trustees.

Penn School became Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School, and following the example of Hampton, advocated a vocational curriculum for its students while continuing the tradition of service to the community. The school dealt with public health, agricultural, and financial problems of the St. Helena blacks. In addition to the work within the black community of approximately 6000, Penn performed a valuable service by collecting and preserving historical manuscripts, oral history and musical recordings, and island handicrafts.

Educational philosophy of the school from 1901 until it closed in the 1940s stressed teaching of practical, vocational skills especially useful in the rural, sea island setting. Pupils in all twelve grades at Penn took agriculture. Girls were offered two courses of study: sewing, or

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

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COUNTY Beaufort	
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PENN CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
#8 SIGNIFICANCE (continued) a.

Education

cooking and housekeeping. Boys were taught basketry, blacksmithing and wheelwrighting, carpentry, cobbling, dairy and livestock, and machine repairs.

The school was exceptional during the years when public education in the area was poor, and graduates of Penn School made outstanding contributions to the local community. Many later taught at Penn or in public schools in the vicinity. One graduate, Dr. York W. Bailey, studied medicine at Howard University and later returned to St. Helena where he was for years the island's only doctor.

Social Humanitarian

In the fields of health, welfare, and cultural preservation, as well as education, Penn School performed needed community services. Having a nurse on the School's staff meant that residents did not have to travel to the mainland for needed health services. Monthly classes for midwives, vaccinations, sanitation demonstrations, and other preventive work against disease was undertaken at Penn School. In the field of agriculture, the island's chief industry, the school sponsored two full time employees, the school farmer and the farm demonstration agent. A model farm was cultivated on the Penn grounds and agricultural fairs held annually.

In addition to its role in education and in community service, Penn School promoted the preservation of the island's unique heritage and exceptional history. The musical tradition was encouraged by formation of the St. Helena Quartet; the Folk Lore Society helped to record and preserve the unique Gullah dialect. Written manuscripts, handicrafts, recordings, and photographs were collected by Penn School personnel. A new museum is being planned to house these collections which have been invaluable to students of the island's culture. For her definitive work on early reconstruction efforts, REHEARSAL FOR RECONSTRUCTION, THE PORT ROYAL EXPERIMENT, historian Willie Lee Rose consulted Penn's primary source material. Other scholars, noted sociologists, folklorists, musicians, and linguists, have also benefited from the preservation of records and artifacts by Penn School.

Although the school was closed in 1948, the community service and cultural preservation functions originated by the school have flourished through Penn Community Services, Inc., organized in 1951. This organization includes five divisions: Black Land Services, Business Development, Child Development, Cultural Program, and Conference Center. Operating as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, Penn is headed by an executive director and a 33 member trustee board who meet annually.

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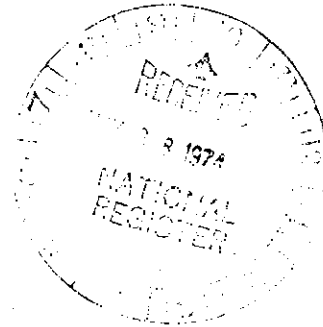
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COUNTY Beaufort	
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PENN CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
#8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued) b.

Political

Historically a leader in black education and welfare, Penn Center also played a role in the Civil Rights movement of the fifties and sixties. Penn personnel actively supported school desegregation and voter registration and education. Dr. Martin Luther King and his staff held meetings at Penn's Conference Center, including the initial planning session for the 1963 March on Washington. During this period, Penn also initiated a training program for community organizers in the South, and more recently the center has been used for Peace Corps volunteer training.



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Penn Center Historic District

2. Location: Boundaries

Penn Center Historic District is divided into two segments. The first of these parcels is to the east of S.C. Highway 45 and the second parcel is between S.C. Highway 45 and a marsh.

FIRST PARCEL:

Beginning at a point located 115 feet north of Brick Church on the eastern right-of-way of S.C. Highway 45; thence S83-56 E for a distance of 500 feet; thence due South to latitude line N 32-23-11; thence S79-53W for 418.4 feet; thence S80-54W for 182.0 feet; thence N02-31E along Highway 45 for 1067.7 feet.

SECOND PARCEL:

Beginning at a point located 115 feet north of Brick Church on the western right-of-way of S.C. Highway 45; thence S02-31W for a distance of 1138.7 feet; thence N87-43W for 1415.5 feet, thence N03-17W for 270 feet; thence N86-40W for 246.7 feet; thence 733 feet north along mean highwater mark; thence S88-24E for 708.6 feet; thence N05-19E for 135 feet; thence S85-32E for 385.0 feet; thence north 02-31E for 66.4 feet; thence S87-29E for 371.7 feet.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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(Number all entries)

PENN CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT

#1 HISTORIC NAME (continued)

Penn Community Services, Inc.

